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March 9th

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An

Inaugural Essay

on

Dysentery

By

John Russell

of

Pennsylvania.

admitted March 22d 1821.

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The prevalence of Dysentery in Adams County Penna during three years of my apprenticeship to the study of Medicine; its varied appearance in each of those years, & the consequent diversity of treatment adapted to its cure, as well as the be-
-lief early inculcated, that the knowledge of treating successfull-
-ly any one form of disease, according to rational principles, enables the person so endowed, to encounter every other which can present itself: have necessarily directed my attention peculiarly to this disorder. Other reasons have influenced me in a-
-opting Dysentery as the subject of the following essay, altho' a hackney'd theme; of which, not the least is, that I have been enabled to draw on the experience of my preceptor, who has, for this purpose yielded me every facility by his oral remarks, & the inspection of his manuscript journals. Thus, I trust, my essay will assume, at least, the appearance of novelty, & the writer not reproachable with the crime of wearying your attention by presenting you the mere gleanings of a limited reading of works of standard merit & universal acquaintance.

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disorder during the years 1817, 19, & 20, with the preceding, accompanying & succeeding forms of disease, and also accompanying meteorological tables: but on reflecting that essays of this kind are designed merely as tests of the Candidates talents and acquirements, and that it would be presumption in the highest degree, to aim at instructing learned professors, I concluded that brevity would be the most acceptable mark of my respect: I have, therefore rendered my observations as concise as possible.

The Spring of 1817 was unusually wet; the Summer also, was remarkable for the number of heavy showers, but with intervals of excessive heat; and Autumn set in with unaccustomed cold. The Dysentery made its appearance in the latter days of June & gradually increased in the number of cases and the severity of symptoms until suddenly arrested by a copious fall of rain & subsequent frost late in August; after which there arose a few occasional cases, with more ameliorated symptoms untill the middle of October when it wholly departed. Vegetation was very luxuriant, & in the limestone districts in which the disease arose & was principally confined

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being flat & watered by small streams & rivulets descending from the mountains, the grass & weeds from too luxuriant a growth having early fallen down, obstructed in many places the small water courses & thus produced unusual & large marshes, on which the summer sun must necessarily have generated miasmata & impregnated the waters themselves with deleterious matters. That the disease of this year was indebted for its causation to marsh miasmata & unwholesome water, is inferrable from the fact that it never extended more than half a mile from some low marshy land, or mountain stream.

Its usual mode of attack was by Chills, great languor & depression, erratic pains concentrating in the Abdomen, fever, with full, tense pulse, furred tongue & flushing of face; diarrhoea in a few hours terminating in distressing tenesmus with bloody stools. The pain at first wore the stamp of Colic, but after some time abated in severity and descended to the lower part of the abdomen & pelvis, & generally induced extensive prolapsus ani. In some, the first symptom was the pain of the bowels, in others, the bloody stools, & a few, there were, who seemed to labour under fever of a bilious nan

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ture (such as had been customary in prior years) for several days before the Dysenteric symptoms evinced themselves. There also occurred many other varieties in the form of attack & still more diverse peculiarities in the progress, but in all the stools appeared principally composed of blood of a peculiarly pungent fator, & defluxions of a mucous or sanguineo-mucous nature were rare: Strangury after a few days continuance of the disease was no uncommon symptom, & altho' to the patient very alarming, yet to the Physician always pleasing as a certain precursor of speedy recovery.

The treatment found most successful, was in the first stage, bleeding until a reduction in the fullness, frequency & tension of the pulse was effected; followed immediately by brisk cathartics, as ℞. Calomel grs X, Jalap grs XV. M. or ℞ Calomel grs XX. ℞ Rhubarb grs XXV, M, or Calomel grs X or XX assisted by ℞ Ricini ℥j to be repeated every hour until the bowels are freely evacuated, or by some of the Neutral Salts; as Sulph: Sodæ ℥j dissolved in ℥vi of tepid water, or Sulph: Magnesiæ or ℞ Fol: Sennæ ℥ß, Crem: Tart ℥ß- boiling water ℔j- one spoonful to be taken every hour until the bowels are freely evacuated. In many the Oil or

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cases done were adapted to the intention, but it was most advisable to remove the chronic affection. After a horse had been affected for a few days, a dose of Calomel by Grains XL, or Tinct. of Opium ℥ ij repeated every morning until the disease was accompanied, or rather was found by a continuance or recurrence of the symptoms that the bowels had not been sufficiently relaxed & evacuated, in persons the general daily treat all the diseases incident to the horse, as febrile action reduced, the pain & other symptoms mitigated, & the patient shall experience more debility than & will then recover may be prescribed for, by ordinary remedies, as decoction, gentian, bitters & Colombo, in some cases with the wine & water, but more it was hazardous to use any active stimulant, & unnecessary, will was for the most part, all that was actually necessary to carry cases convalescence into the convalescent state, & prevent the constitution by astringents & the pain alleviated by opiates particularly Tinct. Colombo & Tinct. Opium succeeded by well. If costiveness should have supervened as it must be promptly obviated, as its direct tendency was to a relapse.

To keep the bowels [illegible] [illegible] nothing more was necessary than cream of tartar & [illegible], magnesia & water or an ounce or so of Castor Oil: or where the patient was under the use of [illegible] [illegible] his bitters with rhubarb to render them slightly laxative. The [illegible] prolapsed part was ordered to be [illegible] in tolerable part with a [illegible] composed of Wine & opium [illegible] in [illegible] & then gently restored to its natural situation. When the protruded parts were so much swollen as to prevent reduction, cold water [illegible] used as a lotion, often allaying the inflammation [illegible] [illegible] parts to the [illegible] of Rosin: This is the [illegible] of the [illegible] of Mullen leaves. Emollient diet & drinks were at all times [illegible] & when [illegible] like nausea, [illegible] be indulged in [illegible] piously. Blisters [illegible] to the abdomen were [illegible] necessary as the disease [illegible] promptly treated, [illegible] in the [illegible] : but there were cases which had been [illegible] to nature [illegible] vicious [illegible] which had [illegible] the [illegible] with so complete a prostration of the energies of the system as to require all

[illegible] remedies [illegible] to [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

complaint in the right testicle, & were to a certainty of longer occurrence & until its size, on a retention of urine was greater & more immediate. The stools were a mixture of blood & mucus. The pain was rather less in the right testicle, & was, when serous to the touch, as much so as the left, even serous from the pelvis & rectum. The intolerance was more intolerable & he actually appeared greatly weaker. The skin was yellow, very dry & rusty & more decidedly tinged to deep jaundice. The countenance indicated greater exhaustion. The mortality was much greater & probably owing to mistaken notions as to the hand & mildly treatment necessary, it seems to have been so simple in the beginning year, that many persons relieved themselves upon & surviving, at without the aid of physicians & gen. Exactly trusted to a dose of castor oil & afterwards decoction of Bear root. The disease would often yield partially to a cathartic, and after a brief of a few hours commence more determinately fatality. Hence the source of many fatal mistakes: the cause's name is yellow not, [illegible] to the belief that other measures had been

effected. It was where the most severe cases were cured by the calomel, & was necessary to repeat it as long as there was the appearance of mucous matter in the stools, or until the digestive & secretive functions were restored. It was always necessary to commence the treatment by a dose, even in the stomach required to be thoroughly evacuated before other remedies could be exhibited, & then an occasional relaxant relieved much to the facility of overcoming the constriction of the upper intestines. They might be repeated several times in the progress of the disease & particularly if the stomach became pasticious or over other articles. It was often necessary to repeat them three or four times in the first stages, & had no bad effects in the latter. Bleeding was rarely admissible. Blisters this season were frequently used, to overcome the congestive debility of the stomach, & it always had the desired effect. They were generally applied on the sensorium & were frequently kept discharging on into convalescence. Emetics & antispasmodic injections were valuable auxiliaries in removing the pain as usual & the men

tient not under the operation of cathartics was indiscernable, & it never manifested in substance in [illegible]. Astringents were inadmissible in every stage & even the mildest tonics could not be ventured with safety even in convalescence!

1820 was still more dry and hot than the preceding; the warm weather set in soon during the winter & even in early summer we began to experience the effects of the excessive drought. Water was scarce & bad in all situations, but on the uplands, where it was in ordinary [illegible] & good the inhabitants suffered more from the [illegible] than those not accustomed to such favours, hence, probably, Epidemy was restricted, this season, to the mountains & highlands & those of the lower districts & [illegible] suffered from its ravages the preceding years, were now unvisited by its visit. It was ushered in this year with all the pomp of virulence it had evinced in its utmost [illegible] the last year, & in a few weeks subsided to none; from which there was no abatement in its after course. It [illegible] with [illegible] & tended until December; notwithstanding the heavy rains & subsequent [illegible]

a tincture of Cinchona. Intermittent fever was prevailing & the typhoid sometimes assumed its sway. It was also in the Dysentery Diarrhoea. The stools were at very short intervals mixed with blood & the quantity of mucus was so large & copious. At the tenesmus was so frequently severe, constipation was unknown. There was generally a remission of fever in the afternoon, it was then the skin was moistened & the secretion of urine was copious & the sole in order the secretion was with ferocio & the excretion the skin & the not cool, was hot not & husky & the countenance flushed & more painful. The constipation was more intractable & rarely succeeded to cathartics even of the most powerful & generally repeated.

The treatment of some cases was the application of leeches, blisters & various plans in the various stages. The order we find it simple to resort to the following remedial, but simple & mild Calomel & Ipecac: in nauseating doses repeated every half hour until the combined disease was removed. Cistorbile or Camphor baths in the paroxysm which was usually in the afternoon

[illegible] for evacuation sometimes of calomel & jalap every hour until show or salivation of mercurial nature. If the calomel & jalap produced purging, or if there was constipation the disorder was instantly arrested & copious evacuations of brown, green, & brownish black, fœtid & malignant bile showed that our intentions were fulfilled. [illegible] the [illegible] treatment is necessary to feel the necessary [illegible] of the [illegible] tube & [illegible] the mercurial action & the patient might be safely trusted to a skilful nurse to convalesce. In seven cases this gave guided to other treatment. Calomel could effect removal of obstruction & stoppage of redundant bile only by restoring its peculiar mercurial action. Sometimes it took effect immediately, at others, particularly if the disease had been suffered to gain strength, its action was resisted for some days, but ultimately it persevered in assuming its only successful one disease. Black bile was the only certain precursor of amendment and guarantee against death.

The chief cause of the former very great fatality of this disease, was the baleful supposition of its contagious nature, but happily this with many other items of traditional credulity is yielding to reason & correct observation. This silly faith not only precluded the unhappy patients of the necessaries & comforts arising from good nursing & the confidence-inspiring presence of friends, but it deterred the Physician from obtaining that correct knowledge of the state of the disease, necessary to judicious prescription; hence the practice was empirical, the sufferer deprived of the sympathy of friendship & bereaved of every comfort, was permitted to sink to a neglected grave through a mass of his own accumulated filth.

That the ignorant & timidly credulous should have so long remained under the dominion of this absurd prejudice is not to be wondered at, but to the disgrace of the profession it must be acknowledged, that even yet there are some members so weak as to yield it the countenance.

Was this essay designed for the public eye it might perhaps be proper to support by facts & reasons, my declaration

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that under its every form it is non contagious, but the learned will gladly excuse the reiteration. If I mistake not there are some men too, renowned for learning & talents who say that under the Typhus form it may be communicable: in answer I have only to remark, that in my native Country, where it has prevailed under that form, experience boldly contradicts such an Hypothesis

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